



Antidepressants: Effective for Some, Side Effects for Many

Depression is tricky to treat. In any given year, some 14.8 million people or 7 percent of the U.S. adult population will have depression that warrants treatment. Women appear to develop depression at about twice the rate of men, though it's not clear why. And while antidepressant medication can improve the symptoms of depression, they can also have serious side effects including sexual problems, weight gain, insomnia, nervousness and agitation. You don't want to take one if you don't have to.

In the latest [Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs Report on Antidepressants](#), we have chosen five *Best Buys*, taking effectiveness, safety, side effects, and cost into account, as initial options to consider for treating depression:

- Generic bupropion (Wellbutrin)
- Generic citalopram (Celexa)
- Generic fluoxetine (Prozac)
- Generic paroxetine (Paxil)
- Generic sertraline (Zoloft)

These Best Buys are substantially less expensive than brand-name antidepressants such as Cymbalta (duloxetine) and Lexapro (escitalopram) and they are just as safe and effective. Commonly-prescribed antidepressants range in price from about \$20 a month to more than \$400 a month. This latest [Best Buy Drug Report](#) shows how you can save \$100 a month (\$1,200 a year) or more if you have to take an antidepressant regularly. So if you and your doctor decide on a drug treatment for your depression symptoms, try one of our Best Buys as an initial first step to see if they work for you.

Since people respond to antidepressants quite differently, and the drugs differ significantly in the side effects they cause. It's not uncommon for someone to try two or three antidepressants before finding one that works. Between 30 and 45 percent of people don't respond at all to treatment with an antidepressant. Keep in mind, too, that experts believe too many people are prescribed medications to treat depression in cases where it is likely to resolve in a few weeks on its own. And psychotherapy can also be helpful, either alone or in combination with medication.

Symptoms of depression include feelings of unhappiness, hopelessness, pessimism, loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies, work and other activities you usually enjoy, decreased energy or fatigue, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, changes in appetite, irritability or feeling anxious. (For a more detailed list, [download the full report](#).) If you have five or more of the symptoms listed for a period of several weeks, you may have depression and should see your doctor.

What's New?

[Off-label drug prescribing: What does it mean for you?](#)

Like most Americans, you probably assume that if your doctor writes a prescription for you, the drug is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for your specific condition or ailment. But quite often, that's not the case. According to recent research, about one in five prescriptions are written "off label," that is, for conditions other than the ones for which they received FDA approval.

Your doctor can prescribe any drug he or she thinks is most appropriate for your treatment. But while some drugs have solid scientific evidence to support their off-label use, the majority of them do not.

The use of prescription drugs off-label is a new series offered by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* with support from American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, which provides detailed, scientific reports and analysis of the available evidence for each off-label drug topic we cover. [Read on](#) to discover how off-label drug use can affect you, and find out which [drugs are commonly prescribed off-label](#).

For additional information on more than [200 prescription drugs](#), alternatives to high-priced drugs and

Best Buy selections for the most common, chronic medical conditions, visit
www.ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.

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